

## **C. PUBLIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS.**

Systems and protocols for communicating timely and accurate information to the public are critical during crisis or emergency situations. This section describes the principles, system components, and procedures needed to support effective emergency public information operations.

### **1. Public Information Principles.**

#### ***a. The PIO Supports the Incident Command.***

Under the ICS, the Public Information Officer (PIO) is a key staff member supporting the incident command structure. The PIO represents and advises the

Incident Command on all public information matters relating to the management of the incident. The PIO handles media and public inquiries, emergency public information and warnings, rumor monitoring and response, media monitoring, and other functions required to coordinate, clear with appropriate authorities, and disseminate accurate and timely information related to the incident, particularly regarding information on public health and safety and protection. The PIO is also responsible for coordinating public information at or near the incident site and serving as the on-scene link to the Joint Information System (JIS). In a large-scale operation, the on-scene PIO serves as a field PIO with links to the Joint Information Center (JIC), which is typically collocated with the Federal, regional, State, local, or tribal EOC tasked with primary incident coordination responsibilities. The JIS provides the mechanism for integrating public information activities among JICs, across jurisdictions, and with private-sector and nongovernmental organizations.

***b. Public Information Functions Must Be Coordinated and Integrated Across Jurisdictions and Across Functional Agencies; Among Federal, State, Local, and Tribal Partners; and with Private-Sector and Nongovernmental Organizations.***

During emergencies, the public may receive information from a variety of sources. The JIC provides a location for organizations participating in the management of an incident to work together to ensure that timely, accurate, easy-to-understand, and consistent information is disseminated to the public. The JIC comprises representatives from each organization involved in the management of an incident. In large or complex incidents, particularly those involving complex medical and public health information requirements, JICs may be established at various levels of government. All JICs must communicate and coordinate with each other on an ongoing basis. Public awareness functions must also be coordinated with the information- and operational-security matters that are the responsibility of the information and intelligence function of the ICS, particularly when public awareness activities may affect information or operations security.

***c. Organizations Participating in Incident Management Retain Their Independence.***

ICs and multiagency coordination entities are responsible for establishing and overseeing JICs including processes for coordinating and clearing public communications. In the case of UC, the departments, agencies, organizations, or jurisdictions that contribute to joint public information management do not lose their individual identities or responsibility for their own programs or policies. Rather, each entity contributes to the overall unified message.

## **2. System Description and Components.**

### ***a. Joint Information System.***

The JIS provides an organized, integrated, and coordinated mechanism to ensure the delivery of understandable, timely, accurate, and consistent information to the public in a crisis. It includes the plans, protocols, and structures used to provide information to the public during incident operations, and encompasses all public information operations related to an incident, including all Federal, State, local, tribal and private organization PIOs, staff, and JICs established to support an incident. Key elements include the following:

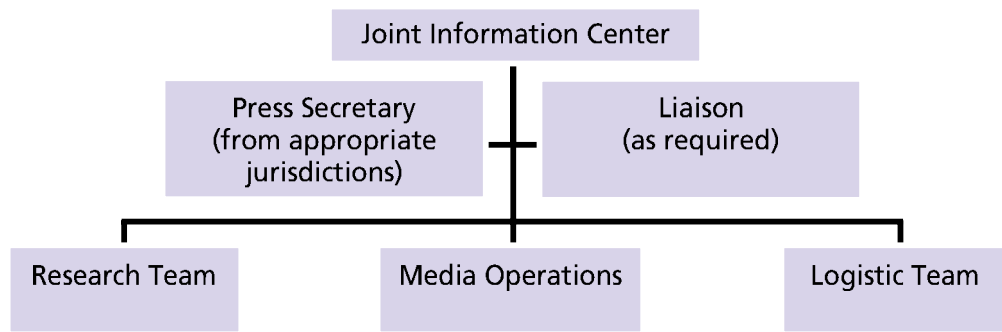
- interagency coordination and integration;
- developing and delivering coordinated messages;
- support for decision-makers; and
- flexibility, modularity, and adaptability.

### ***b. Joint Information Center.***

A JIC is a physical location where public affairs professionals from organizations involved in incident management activities can collocate to perform critical emergency information, crisis communications, and public-affairs functions. It is important for the JIC to have the most current and accurate information regarding incident management activities at all times. The JIC provides the organizational structure for coordinating and disseminating official information. JICs may be established at each level of incident management, as required. Note the following:

- The JIC must include representatives of each jurisdiction, agency, private-sector, and nongovernmental organization involved in incident management activities.
- A single JIC location is preferable, but the system should be flexible and adaptable enough to accommodate multiple JIC locations when the circumstances of an incident require. Multiple JICs may be needed for a complex incident spanning a wide geographic area or multiple jurisdictions.
- Each JIC must have procedures and protocols to communicate and coordinate effectively with other JICs, as well as with other appropriate components of the ICS organization.

An example of typical JIC organization is shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7—Joint Information Center Organization**